

CPYRGHT

3

they come into the harbour. According to one well-informed source, there are now over 300 modern Soviet tanks in Algeria. Mig 21s arrive regularly; the total is now believed to be in the region of 50. There are five air bases (three with metalled runways) spread along the Moroccan border. In terms of personnel, about 700 Russian technicians and military instructors are in the country.

Perhaps surprisingly, relations with the Americans are comparatively relaxed, despite the occasional anti-American outburst in the Revolutionary Council, and frequent press allegations that Washington is "using Morocco to encircle Socialist Algeria."

III ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

In economic affairs the government has tried to tread a delicate path between socialism and capitalism. World Bank and Russian missions have been admitted—but top management consultants from the United States are also in the picture. There have been negotiations with foreign companies on major projects in the gas, petrochemical and oil fields. But few commitments so far have been entered into. The nationalisation of the mines in May, and the confiscation of abandoned French properties, had a disturbing effect on potential overseas investors—but this was only a temporary phase. (Meanwhile the Algerian Trade Union movement, which has 270,000 members, has been threatened with firm governmental action if it presses for wage changes.)

But the key problem of the moment is *food*. This year's harvest may be less than half the normal one. American sources say that Boumedienne cannot be sure of Washington filling the gap, because of overriding commitments to India. The economic plight is accentuated by appalling muddle in import and export controls, due to corruption and the lack of skilled personnel. A vast amount of chewing-gum has been imported—but there is no permit for baby food.

Employment figures reflect the economic stagnation; only 250,000 people are at work full time in industry, and 300,000 in agriculture. Some 700,000 Algerians abroad send home large sums, and this helps to keep the country alive. The population is rising at the rate of 2½ per cent a year; and 100,000 jobs a year need to be created. In fact only 12,000 are materialising.

CPYRGHT

(2) *After Ben Barka, What?*

As the Ben Barka case draws to a close, the major question is: will it end with a French whimper and an international bang? It now looks almost certain that **General Oufkir**, the Moroccan Minister of the Interior, will be tried *in absentia* immediately after the present trial of the six men in custody, and that a few hours later he will be given the maximum sentence, i.e. life imprisonment. Will this lead to a break in diplomatic relations between Paris and Rabat?

The answer may still depend on how the trial is conducted till the very end. Following it in detail, one has the impression that there are two conflicting tactics:

I Those who do not want the trial limited to the men in the dock:

(i) The lawyers of the Ben Barka family have every reason to widen the net: they would like to drag in everyone concerned and are not hindered by the gaullist electoral

CPYRGHT

need to minimise the whole affair. Some of them have personal connections with the French left-wing opposition—and a general election in France is only six months off.

(ii) The counsel for the accused, M. Lopez, have an interest in turning this case into a big political trial. At the last moment, M. Lopez chose for his defence **Maitre Biaggi** and then added **Maitre Tixier-Vignancour** (the unsuccessful presidential candidate), two stars of the extreme right-wing in French politics.

II Those who want to keep it within its present legal framework:

The public prosecutor, or Avocat-General, makes strenuous efforts to prove that guilt in the French services stops at the level of **M. Leroy-Finville**, of the SDECE, i.e. the French secret service. He has been helped so far by the way in which the presiding judge, **M. Perez**, has been trying to keep out all political allusions. (Thus, when a defence counsel asked whether M. Frey, the French minister of the interior, had spent a holiday with his Moroccan equivalent, i.e. General Oufkir, the judge replied, "The question will not be put.")

The odds now are that the case will be limited to the men in the dock and that General de Gaulle's definition of the French side of the affair as "*subalterne*" will prevail. It is this that will make it imperative to attack the Moroccans irrespective of rank.

CPYRGHT

MOROCCAN REACTION

The lunch given by General Oufkir to King Hassan and King Faisal last week was an indication of Morocco's official attitude. This function was added at the last moment to King Faisal's programme as a sign of King Hassan's confidence in his minister of interior. He has no intention of making concessions to France.

Even the opposition, both right wing and left wing parties, are in a dilemma. They would like to embarrass the king, but not at the price of appearing as French puppets. Both opposition parties are concentrating just now on securing a return to constitutional rule and attacking the King on his handling of last winter's food crisis. Both could lose popular support if they appeared to be siding with the French on any issue.

CPYRGHT Backstage Role for General Thi?

There is a great deal of informed speculation in Washington over the role that may be played by **General Nguyen Chanh Thi**, the former commander of South Vietnam's First Army, who was deposed by Marshal Ky six months ago, shortly before the Buddhist uprisings. Undoubtedly, General Thi sees himself playing a key part in the eventual solution of the Vietnam question. What are his assets—and how useful could he be, to both Saigon and Washington?

(i) **Thi's Background:** Now aged 44, General Thi has had a fairly chequered career. He has been in exile before—in Cambodia, following the 1960 attempted coup against President Diem. Thi is said to have flown in one of the planes which dropped bombs on Diem's palace.

His opponents say that, while never pro-communist himself, he allowed communists to infiltrate his entourage, both during his exile in Cambodia and, more dangerously,